EDUCATION AND TRAINING - ONE DONOR'S VIEW

by

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INTRODUCTION

Dealing with donor agencies must be a very frustrating business. They are all different; each thinks its own programs and methods are the best; and their staff travel around the world succumbing to the temptation of telling others what they ought to do, even though their stated policy may be quite the opposite - to listen to what others want to do. This paper expresses the view of a relatively small donor agency, based upon a decade of experiences, good and bad, in training people for various functions in developing-country libraries and information centres, many of them agricultural.

Donor agencies are concerned primarily with money, and therefore so is this paper - not so much the actual costs of various types of training but the more intractable question of whether the benefits are worth the cost, whether the donor agency's objectives are being met in the most effective and efficient way. To take an extreme, and possibly ridiculous example - IDRC Information Sciences Division this year has just over CAD 5 million to spend on projects in developing countries. The most expensive form of training - taking a student and his family to North America for two or three years full-time academic training at the post-graduate level - now costs an average of CAD 70 000. Therefore,

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if we spent our entire divisional budget in this way - and funded no activities in developing countries themselves - we could reach only 50 to 100 students each year. Could we report back to the Parliament of Canada that we were spending our funds responsibly? Our answer would be No, we were not meeting the objectives of our founders in the optimum way. But this brings us to each donor agency's particular mandate.

MANDATE

The International Development Research Centre was legally established in 1970 by Act of the Canadian Parliament at the end of the first development decade. Many hard lessons were then being learned about the difficulties of really helping peoples most in need. To ensure responsiveness to needs, we are governed by an international board so that developing countries can be represented at our top level of decision- and policymaking. Although we are a public corporation funded by the Canadian Parliament, we have considerable autonomy and flexibility and are not tied to Canadian government policies or procedures. Our mandate, as laid down in the founding Act, is '..... to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the developing

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regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions .....'. Our Governors set our mode of operation, which is to fund projects proposed to us by developing-country institutions. Those same institutions set their own priorities and conduct the projects themselves, so that they learn from the experience in all aspects - not only scientific and technical, but also administrative and managerial. Our main program areas are: agriculture, food and nutrition sciences; social sciences; health sciences; and information sciences.

The first Board of Governors, which included developing-country members from the very beginning and which was chaired by Lester B. Pearson, a former Canadian Prime Minister who had led the World Bank study culminating in the well-known Pearson report*, laid down policies which endured for a decade and which only now are being revised. Training policy was one of them. In our first year, IDRC's entire budget was only CAD 1 million, whereas in all our program areas there are many thousands of people at all levels in need of training. It was therefore very quickly decided that our resources would be used best if our training

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* *Partners in Development*, Praeger, New York, 1969.

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activities were confined to the needs of the projects we were supporting. This was the advice of older aid agencies that found it impossible to say whether their general training funds had been well spent, and it has been the basis of our policy for the past decade. Only a relatively small bursary program has gone outside this.

What then are the sorts of projects we support in information sciences?

I should point out that though many aid agencies fund information sciences and related fields, we are one of the few to devote a separate organizational division to the subject. This has enabled us to put together a coherent program, to make connections between projects in different parts of the world, and to collect all our experiences in one place.

INFORMATION SCIENCES PROGRAM

In the Third World, there are thousands of libraries and information centres struggling with tiny budgets and in desperate need of help - in government ministries, research institutions,

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universities, schools, public offices, and private companies. To try to help them all would spread our funds too thinly and we would not make a significant impact anywhere. More importantly, it would also entail a tremendous amount of duplication for the developing-country institutions involved. For example, the same documents would be catalogued and classified again and again in many different places. Our Information Sciences program is therefore intended to help developing countries make maximum use of their scarce resources - human, physical, and financial. We favour activities that involve sharing of information and of intellectual effort, minimize duplication, have a multiplier effect and at the same time reduce dependence on industrialized-country sources of information - a theme taken up by John Woolston in one of the keynote papers for this conference.*

One mechanism for accomplishing this sharing is the international cooperative information system, of which AGRIS** is the prime example in the agricultural field. The basic principle of such a system is that national institutions collect and organize the

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* Woolston, J. E., *The Future of Agricultural Information Transfer: Human and Institutional Aspects.*

** AGRIS - International Information System for Agricultural Sciences and Technology, coordinated by FAO.

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documents produced in their own territories. By following common methodologies for cataloguing and indexing, they input to a common data base and in return gain access to the input of all the other participants. Many IDRC grants have been used to enable national agricultural documentation centres to organize the current national agricultural literature and participate in AGRIS either directly or through regional centres.

Another main component of our program is the specialized information analysis centre working in a clearly defined subject area. It is located at a centre of excellence in that subject so that the information people and the scientists can interact daily to provide a responsive service, a scientific input, an evaluation of information available and the generation of new information from old. Often the subject scope is very narrow - a single crop or group of crops, for example, as at the International Grain Legume Information Centre operated by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Nigeria. Occasionally it may be very broad and bring together information that is widely scattered - as in the question-and-answer service operated by the International Council for Research on Agroforestry, Nairobi, Kenya, and in the program of the International Livestock Centre for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which captures non-conventional

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information on microfiche and makes the indexed files available to participating institutions and other interested parties.

As computer hardware becomes cheaper, more and more information centres in developing countries can consider using computer methods. Many of the projects we support now involve mechanization, especially mechanization using the bibliographic software packages ISIS, which was developed by the International Labour Office and is now available under Unesco auspices, and MINISIS, which was developed by IDRC's own staff. These software packages are available to developing countries under very easy terms and their use by many institutions greatly encourages the recording of bibliographic information in compatible form for ease of exchange.

AREAS FOR TRAINING

Although we fund other types of project, the ones I have described are typical of agricultural information and illustrate the range of activities which might require training: collection and organization of national literature; bibliographic description and indexing, particularly following AGRIS methodology; abstracting and editing;

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production of national agricultural bibliographies; publishing; document retrieval; mechanization applied to bibliographic work and other activities; micrographics, reprography and printing. Many other activities are perhaps more difficult to define, such as identification of need, user studies, promotion, establishment of networks, management and administration, and obtaining financial and political support. Though training is applied to individuals, our ultimate aim is to build the capacity of institutions. We realize that the developing countries are not a monolithic group, and therefore try to tailor training to meet local needs. In all of this work, we try to impart the message that documentation and information work are not merely the passive organization of books on shelves but a dynamic activity providing information in the right form in the right place and at the right time to people who need it.

TYPES OF TRAINING

As the training we support is clearly project-related, the need for it has already been identified in our discussions with the local authorities proposing the project to us. To respond to

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the training needs of projects, we have tried a variety of methods, not limiting ourselves at all to training in the formal sense. All the methods have their advantages and disadvantages.

Focused Courses

To impart a particular skill in a short time, we support focused courses of short duration, typically one to four weeks. They may be mounted by the coordinator of an international or a regional system, such as courses in the completion of AGRIS input sheets, or in indexing according to the *AGROVOC** thesaurus. At these courses, we fund the participation of people from projects we support or plan to support, and we have also often provided the lecturers. Alternatively, we may mount courses ourselves, as we have done for the implementation of the MINISIS computer software or the use of micrographics technology. These courses can have the greatest return, provided the participants are carefully chosen, and come from institutions that are actively involved in the relevant operation. A particularly important aspect is that on return home the students can immediately begin to practise what they have learned. Reinforcement may be necessary later,

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* *AGROVOC* - the multilingual agricultural thesaurus developed by FAO for use in AGRIS.

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and also repetition as there may be a rapid turnover of some students, AGRIS trainees for example. Nevertheless, the courses do affect a reasonably large number of people at the same time, and the course organizers and lecturers acquire experience that can be applied in later courses.

Short-term Courses

The same sort of beneficial interaction between lecturers and students can be found in rather longer courses, such as those mounted under FAO auspices at the College of Librarianship Wales in Aberystwyth and at the International School in Bordeaux. We have enabled students to attend both these courses.

Our experience leads us to believe that courses of 3 to 6 months duration may be the best way in some parts of the world of giving basic instruction in some depth while avoiding some of the disadvantages of long-term training that I will describe later. They could be especially valuable if built around a particular sector, such as agriculture or health - the sector in which the students would eventually practise. Concrete examples would then be taken from that sector and the students would have a thorough knowledge not only of information handling but also

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of where to go to find particular pieces of information.

Many research institutions, administrative bodies, and teaching institutes are finding it necessary to mount such courses of their own covering various aspects of information science. Those given by the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand, in the application of computing to bibliographic work and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, Cali, Colombia, in agricultural information are typical examples. Sometimes formal courses are the only way in which such an institution can respond to a large number of individual requests for study visits without seriously disrupting its other work.

Study Visits and Exchanges

Study visits and exchanges conform to the concept of TCDC* and at first sight can be very attractive. Often a project planned for one institution copies a project already in effect at another institution with similar circumstances and problems. There is then the opportunity of exchanging experiences by sending someone from the new project to visit the existing one. The disadvantage

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* Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries.

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is that it puts a burden on the existing project, which may not have the time or resources to deal with visiting trainees, probably has little experience in teaching, and therefore is likely to provide training that is unplanned, unstructured and unsupervised. For this reason we have not used the method much, though we are trying to build up some projects into resource centres to provide courses of the type described above.

Visits that are too long and involve only observation are least beneficial. It is better to have some specific activity planned, for example, where the trainee can do an actual job for the host institution and in doing so learn the method and the problems. Such training requires effective supervision. This may be found in a well-planned exchange but is usually missing in study tours taking in a large number of institutions in a short time, which we do not favour.

Training by IDRC Staff and Consultants

In certain areas, IDRC staff have acquired a considerable expertise themselves. The clearest example is in implementing the MINISIS computer software, which they themselves developed. Others include microfiche technology, particularly jacket microfiche, and

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the input methodology and subject indexing for AGRIS. In addition to the focused courses already described, we have brought many people to Ottawa to work with our computing group or in our library. We are also tending more and more to give training at the project sites themselves. This has the advantage of exposing the lecturers to the actual conditions and problems on site and enables the instruction to be modified accordingly. We do not post managers to projects, as we believe that managing an IDRC grant gives the grantee valuable experience, which is part of our mandate. However, at times we do post long-term advisors, who tend to be generalists giving instruction locally as required or arranging to meet training needs in other ways as they become apparent. Our regional representatives and Ottawa-based program officers try to visit projects frequently to monitor and advise. They may give ad hoc training on the spot, or they may find a problem that needs closer, more specialized attention. We may then post in a troubleshooter for a few weeks, the main difficulty here being that of finding a suitable person with appropriate experience and an appreciation of developing-country conditions. The ideal person would come from a developing country - we have all heard mocking definitions of the expatriate 'expert' - but practical realities often force a compromise.

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Academic Education

Full-time academic studies, often but not always in industrialized countries, are often requested and can be easily justified, even for projects with specific needs. However, we have had our least success here, although assessing success or failure is difficult and requires a long-term view. Only a few of the people we have supported for academic training have been able to apply what they have learned; some are no longer working for the institutions that asked us for help; some are not even working in their own countries.

Foreign academic education has its attractions. Travel has a broadening effect as well as its obvious glamour. The academic institutions are experienced teachers, have courses already prepared, offer a variety of choices to the student, and provide a qualification that is widely recognized. Often the foreign diploma is the main attraction, even if the student's home country does offer some academic courses, and in some cases it may even be a necessity for advancement.

Perhaps the main advantage of foreign academic training from the professional point of view is that it exposes the student to new

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ideas and concepts and enables him to set his work into a broader context. A broad outlook is needed by the future leaders of the information community in every country. This is a worthy aim, but is foreign academic training the best way of achieving it? On balance our answer is 'No'.

From the project point of view, there are several serious disadvantages. Academic education takes the student away from the project for a long period, during which time the project either makes little progress or has to rely on expatriates, who are expensive, may give the project a direction inappropriate to local needs, and do not have to stay to live with their decisions. Foreign academic training itself is very expensive, it is applied to individuals, and therefore only a few can benefit. Married students may have to be separated from their families to keep the costs down. There can be severe culture shock, even when students go to another developing country. Academic requirements may be different from those at home, the whole attitude to study may be different, and the student's knowledge of the foreign language involved may prove to be inadequate for the rigours of university life. There may also be administrative problems of visas, air tickets, transfer of funds, and so on, which are soluble

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but time-consuming.

The main disadvantage of foreign academic training is, paradoxically, the converse of the main advantage - the introduction to new concepts. Is it reasonable to give instruction in the intricacies of on-line searching to a librarian who has no acquisitions budget? Foreign training in fact can be totally inappropriate for students from developing countries. It can totally ignore problems that are no longer common in the industrialized countries - miniscule budgets, lack of foreign exchange, local bureaucracy, delays of weeks in mail delivery, entrenched traditions, biological or human depredation of collections, poor maintenance of equipment, etc. All these problems are certainly not found at the same time in all developing countries, but they are common enough. They are certainly not appreciated in many Northern academic institutions, which, nowadays, will almost certainly stress mechanization, telecommunications, on-line searching and fast communications, as well as acquisitions budgets indexed against inflation. The result is to encourage the student to disappear rapidly down the brain drain, unless his or her institution has taken the precaution of bonding. Bonding, however, does not relieve the sense of frustration; it probably compounds it. The tragedy is that the

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student's time could have been spent much more rewardingly and appropriately.

Our experience is perhaps not as depressing as I have described it. Certainly we have had successes with foreign academic training, depending to a large extent on the level of the particular students' own organizations. In a certain sense, no training is wasted entirely, and even in cases where projects have lost well-trained people, other institutions in the same region have often benefited.

PRIORITIES

Despite the tremendous demand for training, donor agencies have to watch expenditures carefully, and small donors like IDRC in particular do not have much money to spare for experiments. On the basis of ten years of experience, we have restated our priorities as follows: we are now giving priority first to training in the student's own country, second to training in a Third World institution, third to training in a Canadian institution and last to training elsewhere in the industrialized world. There will always been room for exceptions, and the priorities refer more to

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academic education than to short focused courses. The problem, of course, is that the number of training institutions available for our first and second priorities is very low.

Several years ago, we supported a project in Mauritius, which had many libraries but only a handful of trained librarians. The libraries were being run by untrained staff, many of whom were capable and enthusiastic but who had gaps in their experience, were in danger of perpetuating errors, and perhaps did not have the confidence to embark on new initiatives. The University of Mauritius with our support therefore developed and tested a curriculum aimed specifically at people like this. The main problem was finding a resident course leader, which led to a considerable delay. Nevertheless, a leader was found and, with the aid of an expatriate advisor, the course was successfully developed and presented, and it has now been adopted into the University's regular program. Such a course could well be emulated elsewhere.

LEADERS

Most of my remarks so far have been coloured by IDRC's policy of

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relating training to project needs; but there is clearly a need for something broader than project-related training. Leaders are needed in the Third World to steer the information profession in the direction of most benefit, to maintain a broad overview, to relate projects to each other, and to direct future generations of students. This need has been expressed many times to IDRC staff. African countries are now planning large network projects that will require large numbers of trained people, and to produce them there is clearly an advantage in having an indigenous information science school rooted in a university. English-speaking Africa has few library or information science schools and none like those established with Unesco funding in French-speaking Africa.

What can a small funding agency like IDRC do in the face of such a situation when its mandate is to be responsive to expressed needs?

Some years ago, our Board of Governors reluctantly decided that we could not support an Institute of Library Science to be set up at the University of the Philippines. The amount of external funding expected and the possibility that it could continue indefinitely were important factors in the decision. But the

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Institute went ahead with funding from other donors and has proved itself a success. Moreover, it has demonstrated that a necessary initial boost from a funding agency does not have to imply a continuing commitment. Success itself can attract funds; a small agency can encourage a large one to come in with long-term support. The Philippine experience thus stands as an example to be followed.

We are therefore looking at the requirement for a postgraduate information science school for anglophone Africa. After an investigation by an African information professional, who laid down criteria, we have been involved in two missions comprising our own staff, Unesco's, and African representatives of institutions and the profession. The factors being investigated include the need for good communications and political stability, the need to locate at a university with a high academic reputation, the advantages and disadvantages of locating the school in any particular university faculty, the likely effects of traditional library schools, and the presence of working information centres in the neighbourhood.

The results of the second mission, which was completed only two or three weeks ago, are expected shortly.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

Donor agencies like all institutions have a certain inertia and appear slow to change - but they do. They do learn from experience and newcomers to their governing bodies bring with them new ideas and a fresh outlook.

What I have said about IDRC is the view of only one small agency, but I hope it demonstrates that we are responsive to changing needs. I began by reflecting a frustration that donor agencies are all different; but perhaps this is fortunate. With complementary policies, they can work together to greater effect than by acting alone.